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Leaks, loopholes, and KGB spies

As preliminary official estimates place the damage done by the Walker family spy suspects somewhere between "serious" and "disastrous," a shiver of genuine apprehension has run through the American body politic.

A concerned public is beginning to understand how a combination of Soviet agents and American traitors might succeed in eroding the vaunted invulnerability of the U.S. ballistic submarine fleet, thereby weakening the most effective leg of our nuclear deterrent.

Now that successful espionage has proved to be a real and present danger rather than just escapist fiction, the Reagan administration and the relevant congressional committees are under rising pressure to demonstrate that they are doing everything they can to close the loopholes and stop the leaks.

In a timely report last week, Sens. William Roth Jr., R-Del., and Sam Nunn, D-Ga., of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations spelled out the bloated size of the problem in the fact that more than 4 million Americans now have security clearances. In order to permit a more thorough job of investigation and periodic recertification, the two senators are demanding a 50 percent cut in the number of clearances, and the Pentagon now is promising a substantial reduction.

But even if the number of Americans with access to secret information is reduced and they are more carefully investigated, they remain vulnerable to recruitment through bribes and blackmail by the more than 1,000 Soviet KGB and GRU agents who are in the United States under various forms of diplomatic and commercial cover. Since the FBI lacks the massive resources

necessary to keep these Russian spymasters under continuous surveillance, the Reagan administration has had to come up with some imaginative ways of restricting the Soviet freedom of movement in this country.

Under a new Office of Foreign Missions established in the State Department in 1983, the secretary of state for the first time is in a position to require Soviet diplomats to abide by the same rules that apply to American diplomats in Moscow.

As a result, Soviet officials now have to make all their travel arrangements through an official U.S. travel service when they move outside their restricted zones. Their automobiles now are centrally registered with identifying plates, and they are much more easily surveilled than they were in the past.

There are important remaining espionage loopholes that have still to be closed in the diplomatic relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. The 800 Soviet citizens employed on the staff of the United Nations in New York have enjoyed complete freedom of movement throughout the United States, and 200 of them are identified as KGB.

In order to close this happy hunting ground for Soviet agents, Mr. Roth is introducing legislation that would put the same restrictions on Russian U.N. employees as apply to Soviet diplomats.

Similarly, the presence of Soviet nationals inside the U.S. Embassy in

Soviet Embassy on top of a commanding hill in Washington and the new American Embassy in downtown Moscow. Agreed to by the United States in the palmy days of detente in 1973, the Soviet Embassy is perfectly placed to intercept the communications of State, Defense, and CIA, while the U.S. Embassy has no such advantage in Moscow.

In recent years, the Kremlin has been able to profit at American expense not only from the results of its far-flung espionage network but it also has been able to enjoy a free lunch, dining off the many leaks to the American press of highly classified intelligence from anonymous informants, who were rarely identified or punished.

In fact, the very process of congressional oversight that was originally designed to keep the CIA honest is suspected by Reagan officials as being the source of some of

the most damaging leaks. The recent disclosure to the press of a planned but not yet implemented anti-terrorist operation in Lebanon has solidified support for merging the House and Senate Intelligence Committees into a single joint committee with a much-reduced staff and membership. This radical reform would be impressive proof of Congress's determination to discipline itself.

Finally, those of us who once served in intelligence are aware that the real balance of advantage in the endless struggle between American intelligence and the KGB is known only to a few. The limited number of American officials who have access to all the facts about the extent to which the KGB has been weakened by penetrations and defections are not talking but they exude an air of quiet confidence that suggests our side may not be doing as badly as it appears on the surface.



Moscow in low-level administrative positions is finally being recognized by the State Department as the espionage threat that it long has been. Secretary of State George Shultz is planning to close this loophole and to insist on numerical equality of diplomatic representation.

But it is too late to do anything about the gross disparity between the respective locations of the new